

Testimony of Dr. Michael Miles,
Director, University Honors Program
Given before the House Education Committee
16 February 2007
In opposition to HB525

The University Honors Program is based upon an abiding respect for the individual dignity of our students and the unique personal gifts each brings to the program. We are guided by a vision that views education as a lifelong journey that provides them with a more profound understanding of themselves, their fellow human beings and the world around them.

The mission of the University Honors Program is to prepare academically motivated students to think for themselves and become their own best teachers. Here at Honors we encourage our students to *think in questions* while embracing education as a lifetime journey. It is a journey accompanied by a sense of humility in which we are forever reminded of how little we know and how much each of us has to learn.

We seek to foster an instinctive *curiosity* within our students while encouraging an intellectual breadth and *range* that goes beyond a singular academic discipline in order to encompass the great branches of learning. As such, theirs is a journey that stretches from Homer to the Iraq; from Aristotle to the Big Bang; from Shakespeare to the Human Genome. In short, we seek to prepare our young men and women for a multidimensional, interactive world: the world as it truly is.

To this end, *Honors* provides students with opportunities to take unique interdisciplinary seminars designed and taught by the Montana State University's most distinguished faculty members. For example, all entering Honors freshmen must take a two semester seminar entitled *Texts and Critics*. Classes are restricted to fifteen students in each section and are instructed by faculty representing every college in the University. The course crosses over into many academic disciplines, addressing fundamental issues in the humanities, social sciences, science and the arts through critical reading and analysis of seminal texts. Classes employ Socratic methodology throughout, wherein the faculty teaches through raising questions that permit the students to embark on a quest for what are often illusive answers. Throughout, students are invited to take responsibility for their own learning as they read and discuss a variety of books, all the while engaging in the art of civil discourse that includes mutual respect for one another.

"Texts and Critics" involves not only reading and discussion, but also imaginative and creative writing. During each semester, students are invited to write numerous papers that afford them the opportunity to express their often unique and personal insights into course material. Creativity, individually unique expression and "thinking outside the box," are encouraged in all written materials.

The normal reading list for each semester includes at least 10 books and several articles. Examples of recent texts include: *The Iliad and the Odyssey*. (Homer). *The Republic* (Plato). *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle). *On First Philosophy* (Descartes). *Antigone* (Sophocles). *The Second Inaugural Address* (Abraham Lincoln); *A Short History of Nearly Everything* (Bryson); *Einstein's Dreams* (Lightman); *Beloved* (Morrison); *Slaughterhouse Five* (Vonnegut); *Genome* (Ridley); *Letters to a Young Poet* (Rilke)